



A PLEASANT SURPRISE: BROOKLYN FOLK FEST 2016

BY HALEY CHOUINARD

PHOTOS BY BRIAN GELTNER

Hearing about the Brooklyn Folk Festival, certain images spring to mind. You might picture stages set up near the waterfront in Williamsburg, food vendors selling kimchi and raindrop cakes, and millennials wandering about with banjos strapped to their backs.



(<http://viemagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/vie-blog-brooklynfolkfest-02.jpg>) That's what I was expecting when I started looking into the festival – a weekend full of mustachioed tastemakers who lived off the L train and played the fiddle. It's easy to forget, even when you live in New York City, that Brooklyn is a huge borough. Go a few miles in Brooklyn and you can feel like you're in an entirely different city. I was reminded of that when I walked up to the historic St. Ann's Church in Brooklyn Heights on April 9.

St. Ann's is a beautiful old church nestled on a quaint street in a distinctly grownup section of Brooklyn. In place of the trendy bars and warehouse lofts you'll find farther down the East River, Brooklyn Heights boasts preschools and cute storefronts. It's a peaceful, clean and wonderfully quiet stretch of the city. The church itself has deep musical roots (Jeff Buckley and Elvis Costello played there years ago) and it's now home to the annual Brooklyn Folk Festival, presented by Down Home Radio and The Jalopy Theatre.



(<http://viemagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/vie-blog-brooklynfolkfest-04.jpg>) Upon entering the church, festivalgoers pushed past a sea of strollers to get into Parish Hall, a long, unremarkable space adjacent to the main church. There were a few small vendors dotting the white walls. Brooklyn Brewery, a sponsor of the festival, had two taps set up (it was the first time in the festival's eight year run that they could serve alcohol in the church) and Ben & Jerry's had a booth on the last day of the festival. Otherwise, the vendors were a low-key affair. It felt more like a church craft fair than the food and merchandise section of a festival in one of the largest cities in the world.

Despite the small town feel, the festival attracts artists from all over the country. This year's lineup boasted acts like Nashville's Willy Gantrim, New Orleans' Old Scratch Sallies and Radio Jarocho from Vercruz, Mexico. The musicians played in the main hall of the church, right in front of the pulpit. The performances were simple – no frills and no fuss, much like the festival itself. These were just people who loved music, coming together to celebrate it.

The amount of children in attendance was perhaps the biggest surprise of the weekend. Brooklyn Heights is a family-centric neighborhood, but it still seemed out of the ordinary to see so many toddlers trotting about at a music festival. The fact that families felt comfortable enough to bring their kids along was a testament to the environment that the festival created. It was, for all intents, a community event. People seemed completely at ease wandering around the church and letting the music wash over them. On more than one occasion I witnessed friends hugging in the pews and children dancing in the aisles. Moments of such pure human connection can be rare in New York.



(<http://viemagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/vie-blog-brooklynfolkfest-03.jpg>) There are a lot of modern ideas about what Brooklyn is and isn't, but I think what it really is, is a small town in the shadow of a big city. The Brooklyn Folk Festival is a testament to that.

www.BrooklynFolkFest.com (<http://www.brooklynfolkfest.com/>)



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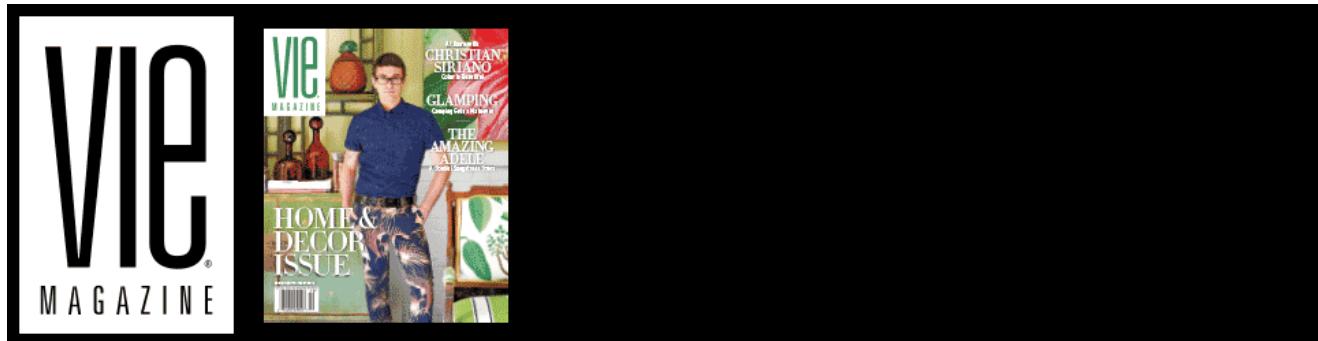
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